

# Overview of Head Start



- The Head Start program is unique in terms of its comprehensive approach to child development. No other program affects as many areas of the child's life. Head Start is based on the philosophy that a preschool program should address children's needs in all areas of development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—and provide support to all of those who affect the child's development.
- The Head Start program is also unique because of its integrated, interdisciplinary nature. **Head Start Performance Standards** state that the activities of all service areas should be integrated. The program is structured so that services in one area complement and reinforce those in other areas. Head Start is designed so that staff members in all service areas work together to provide a cohesive, comprehensive program.
- **The overall goal of the Head Start program is to bring about a greater degree of social competence on the part of enrollees and their families.**

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- The ***Educational Services*** provided by Head Start are designed to meet the individual needs of children and the educational priorities of the community. Regardless of cultural background or special needs, every child is offered a variety of learning experiences designed to foster physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth and to encourage an appreciation for ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Children participate in indoor and outdoor activities and are introduced to new concepts. They are also encouraged to express their feelings and to develop self-confidence and the ability to get along with others.
- Through its ***Disability Services*** the Head Start program offers strategies for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities and their parents. The disability plan will include provisions for children with disabilities to participate in the full range of activities and services normally provided.

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- Head Start's ***Parental Involvement Services*** ensure that parents, the most important influence on their children's development, are involved in program planning and operations and in parent education. Parents serve on Head Start's Policy Councils and Committees where they have an opportunity to make decisions about the program. Parents also assist paid staff as classroom volunteers. Through involvement in the classroom, participation in course and workshops on child development, and interaction with staff parents learn about educational activities that can be used at home. At the same time, staff learns about the needs and interests of the children from their parents.
- Head Start ***Health Services*** provide children with a comprehensive health services that include medical, dental, mental health and nutritional services. Children receive a complete physical exam, including vision and hearing tests, immunizations, and a dental exam. Handicapping conditions are also identified and addressed. Follow-up treatment, dental care and psychological services are provided as needed.
- Head Start ***Nutrition Services*** provide children at centers with nutritionally balanced meals that fulfill one-third to two thirds of their daily requirements. Nutrition education is provided to children, staff and parents.

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- The ***Family Services*** provided by Head Start assist the family in its own efforts to improve the condition and quality of family life. Serving as advocates, the staff identifies the family services needs and works with other community agencies to make sure these needs are met. The staff informs the parents of community resource services and facilitates their use.
- The ***Literacy Services*** provided by Head Start are comprehensive and incorporate the new initiatives mandated by Head Start legislation. They are designed to prepare young children for school with emphasis on early literacy and language development and to help families break the cycle of low literacy and poverty. These services include age-appropriate learning environments and teaching strategies for the children, interactive literacy activities between parents and children, training parents to become the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the educational process, and parent literacy training.
- Head Start ***Transportation Services*** focus on transporting students safely to and from Head Start sites. Transportation services involve the pick-up and discharge of children at regularly scheduled times and pre-arranged sites, including trips between children's homes and program settings. Head Start Transportation Services accommodates field trips for additional learning experiences for children.